

U-M Student Newspaper: Shouting Down Speakers Doesn't Infringe Free Speech

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The University of Michigan's main student newspaper, the Michigan Daily, published an editorial criticizing recently introduced legislation dealing with campus speech. The proposals would require Michigan's state universities and colleges to adopt policies to protect freedom of speech, including sanctions for activists who prohibit others from speaking by shouting down their presentations. The

Daily writes:

"The state legislature shouldn't merely change the wording of the bills to make them more palatable, they should not allow the bills to pass at all. Restrictions on free speech must remain within the limits of the First Amendment, anything more would violate students' civil liberties. Moreover, as student protests become more prominent — and necessary — throughout the country, it is vital that students, school administrators, universities and community colleges remain vigilant over actions taken by the state and federal government to limit speech. For instance, students at the University have expressed opposition to, and ultimately helped cancel, a debate over the Black Lives Matter movement. But, these protests did not infringe upon the free speech rights of speakers who protesters were organizing against, and should not, in future cases like this, be punished."

ForTheRecord says: The Michigan Daily has an interesting definition of the word "cancel."

In September 2016, as reported by the Michigan Daily, some 400 U-M students and others rushed into an auditorium and shouted down a debate over the Black Lives Matter movement. Protesters "jeered and hurled obscenity-laced tirades" for an hour until the moderator at the nonpartisan event gaveled it closed. Some debate.

But according to the Michigan Daily, the actions of these 400 shouting individuals "did not infringe upon the free speech rights of [the] speakers."

Senate bills 349 and 350, sponsored by Sen. Patrick Colbeck, R-Canton Township, would among other things authorize sanctions for these so-called shout-downs. The bills also call for extensive due process protections to anyone charged with silencing a speaker in this way.

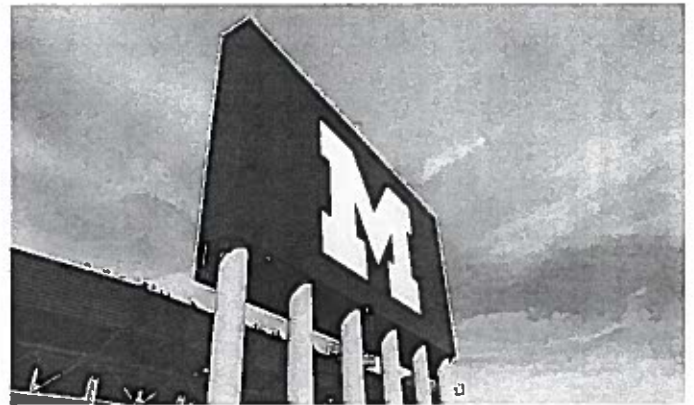


Photo by Ken Lund

"The right to free speech at our universities and colleges is particularly important, because it is there that many of our younger citizens first start to realize the true importance of both their individual voice and the ability to learn from the differences of others," Colbeck said. "That is why this legislation is so essential."

This article can be read online at mackinac.org/23689.